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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the role that electronic mail, specifically CEDA-L (the Cross Examination Debate Association listserv) and NDT-L (National Debate Tournament listserv), play in the development of debate theory. The tabula rasa paradigm is chosen as the case study. Through a rhetorical analysis of the postings regarding tabula rasa and limited intervention, trends in argument development can be detected. The paper begins with an overview of electronic mail in college debate and an overview of the theory concerning tabula rosa provided by scholarly literature. The paper then moves to a consideration of the trends that can be discerned from the postings on CEDA-L concerning tabula rasa and limited intervention. Finally, the paper concludes with a presentation of the implications of electronic mail and debate theory. The conclusions are generally positive, in that the electronic mail network contributes positively to the development of debate theory. Contains 29 references. (Author/RS)

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ELECTRONIC MAIL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEBATE THEORY: A CASE STUDY OF THE TABULA RASA PARADIGM

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A Paper Presented to the Annual Convention of the Central States Communication Association

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This paper focuses on the role that electronic mail, specifically CEDA-L and NDT-L, play in the development of debate theory. The tabula rasa paradigm is chosen as the case study. Through a rhetorical analysis of the postings regarding tabula rasa and limited intervention, trends in argument development can be detected. The paper begins with an overview of electronic mail in college debate and an overview of the theory concerning tabula rasa provided by scholarly literature. The paper then moves to a consideration of the trends that can be discerned from the postings on CEDA-L concerning tabula rasa and limited intervention. Finaly, the paper concludes with a presentation of the implications of electronic mail and debate theory. The conclusions are generally positive, in that the electronic mail network contributes positively to the development of debate theory.

ELECTRONIC MAIL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEBATE THEORY: A CASE STUDY OF THE TABULA RASA PARADIGM

As a society we move closer to being integrated electronically everyday. The unique role of electronic mail (e-mail) systems have had dramatic impact in the way that information is understood and processed in the academic community. Members of the debate community achieve a unique form of connection through forums like CEDA-L and NDT-L. These forums make scholarly communication even easier than a telephone call or presentations at scholarly conferences.

Recently, CEDA-L has become a forum for elaborate discussions about varied topics, exhibiting divergent viewpoints in a seemingly non-hostile environment. Due to the unique environment, new advancements in theory have been disseminated to students, coaches, and anyone else interested. These discussions (or threads) on CEDA-L have broadened both the scope and the actors involved with creating debate theory. This paper focuses on the development of new theory related to the tabula rasa judging paradigm. The comments surrounding the tabula rasa paradigm make it an ideal case study of the theory-advancing benefits of the CEDA-L network. This paper also seeks to address the broad advantages of theory building through e-mail technologies. Finally, the authors recommend that more scholarly attention be focused on the role of e-mail, specifically, and computerization, more generally, in the debate community.

Computerization in Intercollegiate Debate

The application of information technologies specifically in intercollegiate debate has proliferated during the past few years. Garner (1991) clearly foreshadowed this event:

> As society as a whole, and the field of communication specifically plunge into the information age, opportunities for extensive use of computers will increase. As society as a whole become more computer literate, the university student bodies from which forensics draws its population will be more reliant on media technology. (p. 2)

Filippi (1994) argued that "computers are becoming vital cornerstones for an ever-increasing percentage of intercollegiate debate programs" (p. 1). Ah Yun (1993) contended that the trend toward computer data-base research presents serious threats to smaller programs and to the overall process of debate. While Filippi and Ah Yun's articles dealt with the increasing tendency to utilize computer data-bases for research purposes, their points still ring true for communication in intercollegiate debate - the computer age is here to stay and the implications of computerization should be studied carefully.

Since 1993 two different listserve groups have come on-line to assist debaters, coaches, and other interested parties. Specifically, CEDA-L and NDT-L have been extremely popular electronic mail discussion groups. Wood (1995) reported that CEDA-L catalogued over 4500 messages during January 1995, while NDT-L has over 500. These figures are especially significant given the large number of users, many of whom simply read the posts. Wood (1995) noted the benefits of the electronic mail servers for the debate community, "...e-mail allows all comers, students, graduate assistants, new coaches, older coaches to interact or eavesdrop with equality - a process some refer to as digital democracy" (p. 19).

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Related to the growth of CEDA-L, NDT-L, and IE-L, Debate Central, a gopher site, has been developed as an electronic library for articles, case lists, schedules, job openings, membership and mailing lists, instructional programs, and more (Wood, 1995). The primary focus of Debate Central is information collection and retrieval as a library or archive, rather than as a discussion group. That is not to say that people cannot post information in this forum, but the interaction is decreased because there are other discussion forums that fulfill that specific task. Debate Central serves more as a gopher resource center rather than as an interactive discussion listserve group.

Finally, of course, there is non-discussion group e-mail that can be sent via Internet to a huge number of sites. Most colleges and universities are connected to the Internet (or at least the BITNET). Sending e-mail across non-discussion group channels is as simple as finding the address, but much more private. In fact, many follow-up discussions occur in this backchannel forum so that the broad CEDA-L and NDT-L communities need not endure even more messages about topics that are less relevant to the community and are often more personal.

One characteristic of these discussion groups is that they provide vast amounts of information with relatively few entry barriers. In fact, the only entry barrier to participation is understanding how to logon to the host and begin receiving the listserve e-mail. Given that most (if not nearly all) college students have access to computer networks, this entry barrier is a small one. Finding the appropriate syntax to logon is relatively easy as well.

Another characteristic of the discussion group is the vast quantity of messages that are processed. In fact, some feel that the large numbers of posts actually make the medium prohibitive because it takes so long to open and read the e-mail that the user specifically wants. With CEDA-L posting over 4500 messages a month, it would be no wonder if the sheer quantity were to scare away some novice and even a few more experienced users. But, as Wood (1995) noted "Most who venture out on the electronic super-highway find that the benefits of reading and participating in a discussion topic outweigh the disadvantages" (p. 19). Wood referred to the major advantage of the discussion group mail, which must be the availability of ideas and the ability to give feedback for any idea. Information overload is not unique just to discussion groups. Debate Central also has a vast amount of information to share, and as the Welcome note encouraged "Folders can be deceptively deep. Take some time and dive into what we offer. ...discovery is part of the fun" (Snider, 1994).

A final characteristic of discussion group e-mail comes down to personality. In all interpersonal forums emotion can be perceived; the realm of e-mail is no different. The practice of "flaming" allows hostile emotional outbursts to become legitimized and formalized. On a more positive note, however, there are also symbolic expressions that denote smiles, frowns, and several other emotions. Aside from flaming and special symbols, the content of messages on CEDA-L and NDT-L has the personality that any type-written note would.

The Tradition: Tabula Rosa in a Nutshell

The theory building associated with the tabula rosa paradigm has been prolific. This

tradition, though firmly established in the various argumentation and debate journals, has evolved over time into two opposing points of view. These points can most easily be characterized as the proponents of tabula rosa and the opponents of the tabula rose perspective. Of all of the paradigms most contested in CEDA, the tabula rosa judging model must be at the top of the list. Traditional theory building, while enlightening, has done little to resolve the conflict between those utilizing tabula rosa and the opponents who deny the effectiveness of tabula rosa.

A starting point of conflict in the theory concerns the actual meaning of tabula rosa. Rowland describes tabula rosa in the following manner:

> In this view, the judge should not impose a view of theory or substance upon a debate round, but instead should allow the debaters to argue for competing views and then choose the better perspective. In this tabula rosa or "blank slate" approach to debate, all issues, including debate theory, are open to dispute. (1984, p. 78).

In apparent agreement, Freeley notes that "The tabula rasa judge takes the position of having no judging philosophy and allows and expects the debaters to decide the theoretical framework for the decision as the debate evolves" (1993, p. 326). This view assumes that a judge who claims to be tabula rosa enters into the debate free of any preconceived notions about judging and adjudicates each round on its own individual merits. In interesting contrast, Ulrich offers a description of the tabula rosa judge as one who attempts to limit the impact their preconceived notions have on the round.

> The third way to impose rules on debates is for the judge to utilize those rules that the debaters agree to in a debate round or, when the rules are in dispute, to utilize the rule that is best defended. While this approach to judging has been called the tabula rosa approach, it should be noted that this does not mean that the judge is a blank slate. The judge obviously must bring in certain preconceptions about argument into any round; tabula rasa means that the judge should be open to any agreement on all issues and should impose his or her view of argument on the round only when necessary. (Ulrich, 1992, p.311-2)

The argument is that the judge, while recognizing that she or he may have some preconceived notions, attempts to avoid them when reaching a decision unless there is no other alternative. This difference in approach to the meaning of tabula rasa provides the basis of the controversy over the benefits and disadvantages of the paradigm.

The proponents of tabula rosa claim 3 primary benefits from its utilization. While not all supporters of tabula rasa discuss all three benefits, they are the most commonly offered. They can be broadly placed into three categories; development of argument, promotion of education, and consistency with the system. The first benefit, labeled development of argument, essentially claims that by encouraging debaters to argue over the rules of debate, specifically theoretical issues and argument evaluation, the field of argumentation is expanded. As debaters search out new concepts and applications of argument theory, the theory develops and is both broadened and deepened.

> There is a great value in encouraging the development of a diversity of viewpoints about argument. . . . To force one view of argument upon participants in a round may prevent the development of other ways of looking at argument. This diversity of viewpoints is one of the desirable aspects of debate. To argue that there is only one way to argue (or to evaluate argument) and to ignore all other existing or potential paradigms would deprive students of a wider understanding of argument. (Ulrich, 1992, p. 313)

The second benefit, promotion of education, is closely related to the first. Presumably,

by allowing debaters to discuss argument theory in a round, they will actually come to understand the theory. Rather than simply reading or listening to argument theory, the debaters interact with the theory through in-round discussions about the validity and desirability of diverse theoretical approaches. A tabula rosa judge takes the approach that "any theory or argument is allowed as long as it is backed up by sound reasoning and evidence" (Wood & Midgley, 1989, p. 195). By requiring debaters to argue well when debating argument theory, their education is promoted.

The third commonly offered benefit of tabula rosa is that it is consistent with the system. Debate is an adversarial system in which opposing parties must advocate a chosen position. Allowing the debaters to debate argument theory as well as other positions appears to be consistent with the adversarial system.

> The judge does not enter into the dispute to take a side in the argument and assist one participant in arguing for or against a position, but rather the judge should remain external to the deliberation. . . . It is not the role of the judge to ignore arguments that are not refuted. The validity of an argument should not be tested in isolation; rather the only determination of the validity of an argument should be based upon the defense of the argument. (Ulrich, 1992, p. 314)

In other words, the judge should not limit the arguments that can be presented in a debate on the basis of some preconceived notion of argument theory, but should hear out the defense for diverse argument theories before rendering a decision. Each of these benefits is seen by the proponents of tabula rosa to be sufficient reason for adopting this paradigm.

It is interesting to note that while the proponents of the tabula rosa paradigm advocate its universal adoption, they still recognize the validity of other judging paradigms. Most proponents note that in the absence of debate over argument theory, the critic must have some preference for a judging paradigm to fall back on.

> If neither team chooses to argue the judging philosophy, the judge may decide that a certain type of judging philosophy is implicit in the way the debate evolves and choose that philosophy as the basis for decision. If no judging philosophy emerges as clearly implicit in the debate, this judge may decide to select any one of the philosophies to use as the basis for decision. (Freeley, 1993, p. 327).

In other words, the judge must develop a set of standards to use when the debate offers no guidance on argument standards. After all, the judge still must render a decision on some basis.

> Tabula rasa is not a judging paradigm; it is an approach to judging that emphasizes the desirability of having debate rules evolved from each individual debate instead of being imposed upon a round externally by the judge. This does not mean that the judge is freed of the responsibility of developing standards for evaluating argument when there is no theoretical argumentation in the round. (Ulrich, 1992, p. 312)

The validity, indeed the necessity, for alternate judging paradigms is recognized by the proponents of the tabula rosa paradigm not as primary approaches, but as secondary "safeties" to be employed in the absence of argument standards provided by the debaters.

Opponents of the tabula rosa paradigm take issue with the very idea of argument development within the round. One often heard criticism of tabula rosa is that rather than promoting the development of argumentation, the tabula rosa approach actually contributes to a decrease in the depth of argumentation, and an increase in the breadth of argument. In fact, opponents argue, the tabula rosa approach encourages debaters to use poorly constructed arguments, since they carry as much weight as carefully constructed arguments unless refuted.

The debater will be tempted to simply present as many poorly constructed, hasty arguments as possible in the hope that the opposing team will run out of time to answer one, thus making it an unrefuted, absolute argument, regardless of its actual argumentative worth.

> Because tabula rasa critics evaluate arguments based only on what the debaters say about them, a poorly constructed unimportant argument which is claimed to be "absolute," and a well constructed truly crucial argument may achieve equal results. A debater can often win a weak argument by presenting so many reasons for it that one of the reasons slips by unrefuted. (Rowland, 1984, p. 81)

Opponents of tabula rosa also take issue with the notion that this paradigm promotes education. They argue that education would be better served by judge participation. If the judge is allowed to provide input on argument theory, the debater has a greater chance of learning the more in-depth aspects of argument theory. This of course assumes that the critics know more about argument theory than the debaters. Another claim opponents make is that debaters have more incentive to learn argument theories when presented with a variety of judges adhering to a wide diversity of paradigms. "As long as there are a variety of judging perspectives, debaters have a strong incentive to learn about theory in order to adapt to the various judging models" (Rowland, 1984, p. 80). By requiring the debaters to adapt to the judge, the opponents avoid the pitfalls of the tabula rosa paradigm while still providing educational benefits to the debaters.

Another problem that critics of tabula rasa point to is the shift away from substantive issues to theoretical issues. Because time in a debate is limited, argument tradeoff is inevitable. If debaters spend more time developing argument theory, other "substantive' issues must give way. The critics argue that debate about substantive issues is ultimately more important to the debater's education and growth than debate about argument theory.

> One of the values of debate is that it teaches about the complexities involved in public policy analysis. This teaching function helps to produce better politicians, academicians, businessmen, lawyers, and so on. However, questions of debate theory lack the intrinsic importance of questions of policy. (Rowland, 1984, p. 81)

By shifting argumentative emphasis away from substantive issues, tabula rosa judges actually contribute to a decrease in the educational impact of the activity.

Finally, opponents of the tabula rosa paradigm fear that debate over argument theory may eventually destroy the activity. Allowing debaters to question whether topicality ought to be a voting issue, for instance, could lead to the destruction of the activity by promoting cases that stray ever further from the topic. Eventually, the topic may well become irrelevant, making the research burden for any team too immense to manage, and ultimately leading to a loss of interest in the activity. The same can certainly be true of any number of theoretical issues. The concern of the opponents is that any theoretical issue, if taken to the extreme, could destroy the debate process. Tabula rosa, they claim, provides the potential for just such a scenario.

Critics of the tabula rosa paradigm do not necessarily advocate abandoning the perspective altogether. Often, a call for a limited form of tabula rosa is made, although standards for such an approach typically remain vague. Rowland (1983) suggests that "the judge would require that debaters present statements which he or she understood as clearly supporting a particular claim before the claim was considered legitimate" (p. 83). Unfortunately, Rowland fails to describe

just how a judge determines what is clear or not, or for that matter what is a claim or not. However, he does attempt to define some areas that a judge should exclude from the realm of the debate round, such as time limits and certain voting issues, like topicality and ethics violations. Essentially, Rowland argues that any argument that is perceived as threatening the existence of the activity be thrown out on its face. In the same vein, an article offered by Bunch (1993) takes a first step at finding a compromise. Bunch is essentially attempting to prove that there is common ground between the proponents and opponents of tabula rosa. Bunch argues that while the proponents of tabula rosa would agree that an absolute blank slate is an ideal and not attainable, opponents of the theory may actually support the same things that the proponents do. In fact, argues Bunch, both parties to the theoretical discussion are actually on the same side. Proponents of tabula rosa recognize the need for some minimum level of argument standards, while opponents spend their time preaching to the converted that a blank slate is an impossible ideal. "The immediate implication of this confusion is that critics who reject the tabula rosa ideal because it is unattainable, yet otherwise concede the desirability of that ideal, are themselves advocates of tabula rosa even though they may not know it" (Bunch, 1993, p. 175). The real dispute lies in choosing which set of minimum standards are best for the tabula rosa judge to use. Bunch explores several options in this article without soundly supporting any particular approach, but at least he lays the groundwork for compromise between the opposing groups.

Method

In order to study the development of theory on the CEDA-L listserve a sample of 33 postings was collected. These posts occurred from May 15, 1994 to August 7, 1994. Posts were collected based on the thesis and intent of the author in relation to tabula rosa judging. Posts having no relevance to the tabula rosa paradigm discussion (thread) were not considered. Postings meeting the criteria were read and conclusions were drawn from their content. Postings were analyzed by looking at the integration of theory and practice, refutation, depth of response, and affect of the writer.

Results - Building on the Tradition: E-mail and Theory Building

Since the introduction of electronic mail to the debate community several significant changes have developed. These changes highlight the benefits of using electronic mail as a testing ground for advancements in theory building.

Electronic mail systems integrate theory and pragmatic application. Perhaps the best test of any theory is the real world application that achieves some desired effect. The same can be said about the tabula rosa paradigm. Theory is commonly tested by the use of common and occasional odd examples that clarify various positions. This is best displayed on the listserve when authors attempt to support theory with examples from different debate rounds as Lechtreck (1994a) noted

> The writer then says 'TR allows for some low probability scenarios to be taken too seriously.' I'm curious who put the writer in charge of deciding which scenarios are to be taken seriously and which ones aren't? I thought that was the job of the teams. Actually, the TR kritic allows the debaters to debate which scenarios deserve

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> consideration. If I am a negative, and the aff says we must invade Iran or die from a nuke war, one of my strategic choices may be to argue that it is a low probability. As a TR kritic, I would listen and evaluate to this tact. However, it is the non TR kritic who simply dismisses the scenarios low probability. Yes, TR kritics would ALLOW a low prob scenario to be taken seriously, but to do otherwise would be horribly interventionist (and egotistical as heck). Do you begin to see why non TR is associated with intervention? (p. 1)

Roskoski (1994a) also demonstrated the type of integration that can emerge from the listserve discussion. He contended:

> DEBATE IS NOT ABOUT TRUTH SEEKING.
> Before I explain the implications of my claim, I would do well to warrant it. Accordingly, I will supply a list of characteristics of debate which strongly suggest that it is not about truth seeking.
> a. Time constraints: Trials etc. (forums dedicated to truth seeking) apply none. Certainly none as harsh as 8-3-5 (or 9-3-6). Debates do. Ergo, the competitive necessities are judged more important than the pursuit of truth.
> b. Discovery: Debate doesn't have it. My teams don't have to disclose cases before coming to tournaments. If we wanted to find truth, they would.
> c. Rewards: We give trophies etc. As I heard Mr. Herbeck put it once, 'my teams don't get in the van to go home from a tournament and say 'Gosh, we're really happy we made some truth.' The rewards debaters get are related to cognitive development, not truth seeking.... (p. 1)

It is common to see theory and practice integrated throughout the postings. This integration can extend beyond the simple application of tabula rosa to the exploration of new frontiers, as is the case with the limited intervention perspective. McGee (1994a) exemplified this new direction:

> As a debater, I occasionally made use of arguments that substantively violated U.S.-American presuppositions (e.g. anarchy good, humankind intrinsically evil). As a judge, I continue to tolerate arguments that demonstrate various and sundry informal fallacies, and I reluctantly have voted for arguments that I considered ethically problematic. Particularly in my role as judge, I continue to consider such arguments [not] because voting for them allows me to sleep peacefully at night, but because opposing debaters did not make and/or successfully extend suitable responses in accordance with academic debate's most cherished procedural principles (e.g. a dropped argument has been conceded to the opposing team). I adhere to these procedural principles because I believe that debate pedagogy works better with them than without them and because I have other means of discouraging the most egregious practices, including low speaker points, extensive oral critiques, written ballots, and long conversations with coaches.

Whitney (1994a) explicated the importance of testing theory through it's practical uses. He wrote:

> Matt writes: Claims such as Mr. Whitney's that tabula rosa labels are misapplied, or that tabula rosa people exert peer pressure etc. are not relevant to the merits of the philosophy. The philosophy exists independent of its advocates and the mistakes or misbehavior of the advocate does not discredit the philosophy.
>
> I'm afraid that I can't agree with your assessment here, Matt. These things are relevant to the discussion of TR, or any philosophy. If a philosophy is going to have any use, it must be able to be applied in the real world somehow. For us, it's in the debate world. (p. 1)

The movement toward praxis is even more important for two reasons. The emergence of praxis, first, speaks to the student debater that testing scenarios must be done at more than a theoretical level; it must also be practiced.' Throughout the postings on tabula rosa, there is evidence of students utilizing low-probability scenarios as a technique to outweigh smaller impacts. This type of reasoning can lead to slippery slope fallacies that undermine debate generally. Only through more effective tests, like empirical examples, can the movement toward fallacious argument be stopped. The second reason that the integration of theory and practice is important is that too often the practice portion of understanding is on the short side of the of the editor's cut and paste icon. Fortunately, some of the pragmatic implications of tabula rosa

have been explored, but other theoretical positions have not been so lucky; for instance, the case of limited intervention. Discussions on the listserve allow deeper understandings because there is more praxis.

Electronic mail systems encourage specific refutation by scholars and lay people. Perhaps the most notable aspect of the use of the listserve for threads and continuing discussions' centers around the copious on-point refutation that occurs. In some debate rounds there may be criticism that clash was ineffectual, but this claim is largely untrue in the listserve setting for three reasons. First, the response that is made can be as immediate as a push of a few keystrokes. All it takes to make a response is to examine the post that you wish to oppose then set out the argument against the position. Second, clash is more pronounced because there is an electronic record of the original inflaming statement; debaters cannot reframe (or slime) on the listserve because the text is the truest of records. Finally, refutation on the listserve is limited only by disk space and carpel tunnel syndrome. For the postings examined in this case study, it was not uncommon to find several postings that were two or three full typed pages, or 9 to 12 computer screens. A significant number were longer yet. Since length limitation is virtually nonexistent, very extensive postings can be dedicated to specific on-point refutations.

Several excellent examples explore the popular technique of refutation. For example, Lechtreck (1994a) writes:

> The writer then says, 'There is peer pressure to be TR. If you say you aren't TR you're considered less qualified.' I disagree with this statement. I know several non TR kritics who are very qualified...They are bad (in my opinion of course) kritics, but not unqualified. There is a big difference. (p. 1)

Lechtreck (1994b) also continued:

> Mark then says, 'You say passive kritic, some are saying L.I., I call it critic of argument...' Please Mark, these are nothing alike. The passive kritic and L.I. kritic remain outside the debate. We make the debaters do all the work, and don't make arguments for them. A critic of argument, by its very name assumes that there are some arguments that you won't listen to. You are involved in the debate more than the TR kritic. Finally, on the name debate, you miss the point. When I say you are too wrapped up in the TR name, you respond with the same stuff. (p. 2)

Whitney (1994b) also used extensive refutation techniques as is demonstrated in this excerpt from the posting:

> >>The TR judges have the same flaws, because they, and everyone else DO intervene. (Whitney prior posting)
>
> >Talk about fallacies. To claim that TR and interventionist judges are the same because they both intervene is like saying that a person who kills the gopher in his lawn is the same as John Wayne Gacy because they both are murderers. Now there is a small matter of degree of harm. (Lechtreck prior posting)
>
> I'm not sure which fallacy you're referring to, but I think what I said about the continuum above would apply here. (p. 3)

Response and refutation are very practical skills that can be maximized due to the commitment associated with the written word on the listserve channel. The CEDA-L listserve allows good on-point refutation of postings. Throughout all of the postings there was no mention of the inappropriateness of refutation, though there were preface apologies for the length of postings.

Electronic mail systems promote in-depth responses, generally, and elaborate theory on limited intervention and tabula rosa, specifically. In terms of the general depth of the

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postings, there is some degree of variation. Several postings were lengthy in nature, and yet several postings that were only a paragraph were equally accepted on the list. However, it seems like the debate maxim "The more you put out, the more you have to cover" applies very well in this situation. Those people posting longer positions were often involved in refutation, and this refutation led to counter-refutation, and so on. The Lecktreck/Whitney interaction, as well as the Roskoski/Whitney/Broda-Bahm and McGee/Bunch dialogues all seemed to maximize effective refutation strategies. Each of these sub-discussions became deep due to the extensive refutation. Depth, however, is difficult to define. In several of the postings, depth would necessarily be the complexity of the arguments that were advanced, which is problematic to assess. Other elements of depth include referencing of published authors in the field (Hunt, 1994a; Roskoski, 1994b; Whitney, 1994a; Whitney, 1994d), internal citation of publication (noted in over half of the postings), the length of the postings, and by definition, the amount of refutation that occurred in each posting. All three of these secondary artifacts of depth evidence the comprehensiveness of the arguments posted on the list; and all three were in abundance in the postings that were analyzed.

In terms of topic specific instances where depth is evidenced, one should note Roskoski's two part posting on June 15 as an excellent example. His comments preview and summarize the depth of the posting:

> This essay is rather lengthy. It is a response to the tabula rosa discussions occurring on the CEDA-L of late.... It consists of two parts. (Roskoski, 1994a, p. 1)
>
> I hope this hasn't been too boring or tedious. I present it only because I felt some major points and assumptions were being neglected in the on-line discussion of tabula rosa judging. I welcome any commentary or criticism. (Roskoski, b, p. 9)

Certainly Roskoski's post is not the only example of depth in terms of the theory of limited intervention/tabula rosa. Debate over the utility of the tabula rosa/limited intervention paradigm splintered off into even more dialectical directions. Later in the tabula rosa/limited intervention discussion Pogreba steps away from the tabula rosa and limited intervention models and critiques the outcomes that both types of judging philosophies produce. He writes in part:

> Finally, the standard TR response that 'least intervention' is acceptable makes it awfully hard to pin down the position. I think that judges should not intervene for issues of race, sex, ideology, etc., but when a judge has a reasonable preconception about a round or topic, it's only fair to just admit it. Don't hide behind the mantle of TR and justify a ballot; set up your framework for a round and evaluate it without checking your brains at the door. (p. 1-2)

McGee (1994b) immediately extends the dialectic when he responds with the following explanation:

> My concern vis-a-vis Pogreba's message is similar to my concern with Aaron Bunch's recent A&A article. Many of those who criticize TR seem to believe that, once the impossibility of non-intervention is conceded, that any level of judge intervention must be justifiable. If we cannot NOT intervene, the argument goes, the debate community just ought to live with intervention and adopt norms that encourage certain forms of it. I have noted previously on CEDA-L that I do not use the TR label to describe my own judging practice because I think the metaphor is misleading; no one who calls herself TR really believes that blank slate status is a possibility, I hope; instead those critics who label themselves TR have adopted an orientation to judging they hope minimizes intervention in hopes of maximizing fairness, education, judge predictability, and so on. I use the least intervention label because I think this term describes my practice, although I am certain that I fail from time to time. In other words, LI (and, by default, TR) critics have adopted a procedural norm to describe their judging. Rather than check their brains at the door, these critics listen carefully to all the arguments made by the debaters in a given round, consistently apply these procedural commonplaces of the debate community (e.g. 'the burden of rejoinder is absolute'), and try to make the decision that best

> rewards the debate that took place in a given round (i.e. the 'least interventionist' decision). (p. 1-2)

Though depth is difficult to display, the postings analyzed provide proof that electronic mail discussions can be lengthy, provide effective refutation, and have extensive refutation. Each of these characteristics provide some level of proof that depth of argument is achieved rather than sacrificed when e-mail is the medium of discussion.

Electronic mail systems allows some level of writer's affect to emerge. This point is certainly not intrinsic to electronic mail systems, but there is some concern that the electronic mail delivery systems delete personality in favor of task orientation. This does not seem to be the case in the discussion under analysis here. There were several notable instances that expressed the sentiment of the author. These expressive actions seemed to be grouped into two types. First, there were expressions that seemed humorous to simply exploit a point made by another contributor. Whitney (1994a) wrote:

> And I will cite some more real, live experts! Stay tuned. If you've read all of this, you may need a hobby. (p. 5)

Srader (1994a) also takes a less serious tone in his message. He said:

> Maybe I'm getting to old. But TR/LI doesn't seem as attractive to me as it used to. I used to say 'it's their debate, not ours, and we're here for them, not vice versa.' But that philosophy need not be 'run wild children: the playground is open'. (p. 1)

Whitney (1994c) begins his posting with a rather humorous explanation:

> I made my weekly visit to my office to see if it was possible for my plants to get any browner that they already are.... I just wish to clarify a couple of things, then I will stop harassing your sacred cow. (p. 1)

He ended the posting with the following:

> Bossy, the sacred cow, says 'moooooove on.' (p. 3)

Lechtreck (1994a) cryptically poked fun at a commonly used debate quotation:

> To paraphrase Montague, there is a plague which befalls debate, much worse than the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. It's more common name.....Interventionism. (p. 2)

Mahoney (1994) concluded his post with the following statement:

> A judge who works hard not to intervene is a good judge indeed. (p. 2)

The second notable method of interjecting affect into the discussion came when people closed their postings. There are several examples of people commenting on their participation in the thread. Lechtreck (1994c) concluded with the following:

> I would like to say to Mark, that I have enjoyed the thread. I am always happy to continue these types of debates, but I fear the rest of the list may be getting tired of it. If I am wrong, I will continue (but I don't think I am). Thanx for the interplay and thanx for the forum. (p. 2)

Whitney (1994b) responded with equally appreciative commentary:

> Well Bob, I've enjoyed it too. But I think you're probably right about other people being bored with this, although I would've been interested in other's opinions. (p. 3)

Similarly, the interaction between Bunch and McGee also witnessed the expressive type of message. Bunch (1994a) started:

> Well, thanks for the ride. (p. 2)

McGee (1994c) responded:

> Again, thanks to Bunch for an interesting dialogue. (p. 2)

Bunch (1994b) further commented:

> Thanks again to Brian McGee for a discussion which, finally, focused the issue in my own mind. (p. 2)

McGee (1994d) finally puts the sub-discussion to rest:

> My thanks to anyone who has had the energy to read the exchange between Aaron Bunch and me. (p. 1)

Electronic mail sources have been criticized for being too impersonal, but the texts under analysis here show a group of people that feel relatively comfortable interpersonally with sometimes heated discussion. The cited contributors seem to have no problem indicating their satisfaction with the harsh interaction. Additionally, some members of the community feel free to write comments that poke fun at themselves or the community as a whole. Both of these types of affect messages display the interpersonal closeness that this community feels though the contributors may have little relationship except that based on the issue at hand.

Conclusions

The above findings lead to some interesting conclusions about the development of debate theory in electronic media. As noted in the review of tabula rosa literature earlier, a hole in the research exists. Generally, the proponents and opponents of tabula rosa have remained divided, with neither side attempting to pursue any sort of compromise. It is as though the debate ended at "Tabula rosa is bad," versus "Tabula rosa is good," without any further thought. The article provided by Bunch in Argumentation and Advocacy provides the sole glimmer of hope. The authors discovered, however, that electronic mail has provided a forum that allows those interested to "fill in the gaps" in research literature, at least in the case of the tabula rosa paradigm. Bunch, along with many others cited in this paper, have followed through on the development of theory concerning the tabula rosa paradigm. The emergence of the theory of limited intervention (LI) is the logical extension of the discussion begun in research journals, but never finished there. Rowland, a primary critic of the tabula rosa paradigm, hints at limited intervention as early as ten years ago. "Debate could profit from the legal experience with a dialectical model of argument and move to a limited tabula rasa model in which judges would apply a minimum standard for argument and evidence to all claims" (Rowland, 1984, p. 83). Even Ulrich (1984), a major proponent of the paradigm, recognizes the need for critics to maintain a theory of argument to apply in debates where no framework is presented by the debaters. However, the merits of exactly what those standards should be are not meaningfully addressed until Bunch's article in 1993, and even then, only in a cursory manner. However, the use of CEDA-L and NDT-L as a forum for discussion has allowed the development of what may be an agreeable compromise between the two opposing camps.

A second conclusion that the authors have reached is that the development of the theory is much quicker on CEDA-L and NDT-L than in other more traditional forms like publications and presentations. There are several reasons this is true. First, the open nature of electronic mail services mean that all forms of editing are omitted. Only self-censorship inhibits what can be exchanged in the marketplace of electronic mail. While many poorly developed ideas or

arguments undoubtedly make it onto the network, many well-constructed arguments that may not make scholarly research are heard (or read). Also, the nature of CEDA-L and NDT-L make for more direct refutation. While a certain level of respect is usually maintained even on the network, the postings are generally less formalized and often more to the point than is usually found in published or presented works. Often, published or presented works are written as a general comment or response, and do not focus on specific points as do many E-Mail messages. Finally, a unique feature that allows for increased discussion is that virtually anyone can engage in the discussion on the network. Few undergraduate students have works published or presented, and yet they represent a large percentage of the people who are directly affected by the development of tabula rosa theory. Their input has also proved valuable in the theoretical development.

One interesting side note concerns the role of CEDA-L and NDT-L in the specific instance of theory forming. Many of the proponents of the tabula rosa paradigm support it precisely because of its educational benefits to the students. The argument has been advanced that nowhere else can the student become skilled and knowledgeable on the subject of theory than in the debate round, and so judges should allow debaters to dictate the standards of argumentation in the round. However, the emergence of CEDA-L and NDT-L, which allow open access to students as well as coaches, may dejustify the need for the tabula rosa approach. Perhaps by allowing the debaters to "debate" theory issues through E-Mail while imposing a variety of argument standards (based on judge preference) in the round, debaters will actually receive a more sound education in argument skills.

Certainly, more research into the impact of electronic mail on the debate institution needs to be undertaken. Specific studies to determine how many participants are actually involved with electronic mail would be relevant as would information regarding the actual in-round impact that electronic discussion are having on the community. As in the case of tabula rosa presented here, the authors suspect that the effects of electronic mail are only beginning to surface and will continue to have an increasing influence on debate as technologies proliferate.

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